

## The Bible Unearthed- Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts

Silberman, Finkelstein

### The historian's secular perspective

In a nutshell, the authors make the case that biblical history consisted of a number of tales coming down through the tribes of Canaan from the bronze and early iron ages. The older the tales, the more they had the quality of legend and folklore. In any case, the authors make a strong case that King Josiah, ca. 700 BC, had them pulled together into a cohesive narrative that served his political purposes. The more recent historical figures, David and Solomon, were imputed a grandeur which has no support in the archaeological record. Older figures such as the patriarch were rearranged. They suggest that there had been somewhat independent tales of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob which were united into one story linked by a genealogy.

Key to the thesis is Josiah's political problem, that of uniting the tribes of northern and southern Canaan. In the Bible, the tribes of Israel and Judah. Josiah was king of Judah and constructed a history that would give justification for his pretensions over Israel. Those tribes had been defeated in the two prior centuries by various neighbors, among them Philistines, Phoenicians and Amorites, and Josiah felt the time was ripe to expand his own kingdom.

Certainty is the chief characteristic which separates religious conviction from historical or archaeological speculation. Finkelstein and Silberman speculate about what might have been, on the strength of the concordance of physical and scriptural evidence. They express their doubts and confusions and assess the relative strength of their surmises. It is a refreshing approach to scripture.